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## REVIEWS

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*Round about a Pound a Week.* By MRS. PEMBER REEVES. London: G. Bell & Sons, Limited, 1914. 2s. 6d. net.

Sir Robert Giffen estimated, twenty years ago, that there were in England two million families living on an income of less than a pound a week. Professor Bowley estimated in 1911 in England that 2,500,000 adult men working full time earned less than twenty-five shillings a week, and Philip Snowden, on the basis of Board of Trade figures, some published later than 1911, concludes that the [Mr. Bowley's] numbers are considerably below the true number and the estimate of Sir Robert Giffen in 1891 is less than the whole truth in 1914. The income thus in hundreds of thousands of families remains at a level which all students would agree is on or below the margin of poverty. And during this period not only have the prices of necessities risen, but new burdens have been laid on the family group. The compulsory school and child-labor laws have been enforced with steadily increasing rigidity, and higher standards of child-care have been formulated. Not only is the child no longer a source of income as children beyond the tenderest years were until the recent past, but they are the occasion of increasingly great expenditure for food while they are younger, for shoes and clothes when they are older.

Obviously the situation is an unendurable one from the point of view of reasonable justice and of national vigor. An income, below the margin twenty years ago, cannot bear the additional burdens of child-care laid on the family under modern standards of parental obligation. Many methods of attack are proposed. The minimum wage at least recognizes that there is a community standard; but the minimum wage cannot, until administrative machinery has become vastly more delicate, take notice of the size of the family. The school is already authorized, by the provision of Meals Acts, to give necessitous children of school age meals on certain days of the week during certain months of the year. But these acts do not apply to all meals, nor to all days of the week, nor to all months of the year. Since the days of Sir Frederick Eden<sup>1</sup> at least a favorite remedy has been the more skilful administration of their house-

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *The State of the Poor*, 1797.

hold affairs on the part of the women. Undoubtedly there is room for improved domestic practice, but the result of this study goes to show the slender margin of improvement in living conditions and in the well-being of children to be hoped for by trying to increase the skill of women who have less than a pound a week to spend.

This study has been made by the Fabian Women's Group among families in "Lambeth," London, whose household allowance is about twenty shillings. They were not the disorderly or vagrant poor, nor the unemployed or unemployable, but families of men in regular work, men who did not drink, whose meager share in their own earnings was not above two shillings, from which clothes and carfare had to be paid. The studies are based on visits made, and accounts kept, often with great difficulty, under the sympathetic and patient direction and supervision of the investigator. There were thirty-one families studied, selected from the list of a lying-in hospital on a basis of there being a prospective baby who with the mother should be observed until the child was one year old. The period of observation was from three months before until a year after the baby's birth. The families ranged from three to eleven children born and the exact use of the income was accurately ascertained and sympathetically interpreted. The inadequate and costly housing claiming a much greater share of the income of the poor than in the case of the well-to-do, the makeshifts for furniture, the inevitable resort to the insurance, (by way of thrift) to save one's dear ones from a pauper burial, the articles chiefly relied on in the diet of the poor, their practices in buying, determined largely by lack of space and the constant necessity of underfeeding, the effect on children, who at birth have a basis for a fair physical development, of wretched housing, inadequate clothing, underfeeding and overwork on the part of the mothers, are all set out with accuracy and with great sympathy. Perhaps the most interesting portions among the whole extremely interesting material are those relating the mortality among the children to the rent paid, and describing in detail the ways in which the mothers in these poor homes spend their time. Space does not permit of long citations here, but what comes out of such a study is what must come out of such conditions honestly observed. It is made clear that the poverty is due to no lack of industry or of effort on the part of the father, that the children (p. 174) of the poor suffer from insufficient care, not "because the mother is lazy and indifferent to her children's well-being," but because having "but one pair of hands and one overburdened brain . . . she can just get through her day if she does every-

thing she has to do inefficiently. . . . One woman is not equal to the bearing and efficient proper care of six children." The logic is inexorable. The new responsibility laid on the parents can be fulfilled only if there is co-operation on the part of the public. Moreover, a nation is only as strong as the children who come out of the great mass of its homes. Besides, the modern conscience rebels against the injustice evidenced by such unequal allotment of burdens. The remedy proposed is the establishment of a public department of true and intelligent guardianship. "The final responsibility for the child's welfare, the paramount authority in securing it, belong to the state. Why not recognize the national responsibility by the definite appointment of a public guardian who would enter upon the relation of co-guardian with the parents of every child at the registration of its birth?" There is nothing novel in the reasoning. The ancient equity powers exercised by the Court of Chancery are analogous in kind and rest upon the same reasoning. The difficulties lie not in public power nor in the reasoning, but in actual lack of technique. In Illinois, for example, there is not yet even a full registration of births, and with such civil service as we have developed we can hardly yet hope to undertake tasks so delicate and difficult. There are bright spots of public effort to which attention may be called—the administration of the Funds to Parents Law under Judge Merritt W. Pinckney and Chief Probation Officer Hunter, the creation of public service bureaus through which the county enters into a special relationship of service with parents whose children are in institutions, are suggestions of realization that the task is a difficult one. The various functions of the school as guardian may and should be developed as rapidly as practicable, and with the experience and technique that may result from these the basis for a real co-guardianship—parental in intelligence, in flexibility, in patience—may be realized. From the testimony taken before the Royal Commission on the Poor Law and from criticisms of the administration of those laws under the Local Government Board, however, the reader is led to think that even in England much remains to be done in the perfection of technique and in the development of persons skilled in these forms of social service before such tasks as those suggested by this study can be properly performed. In the meantime from inquiries like this comes an impelling impulse in the direction of working out such methods that the work may be honestly undertaken.

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